

[front page](#)

[news](#)

[back issues](#)

[comment](#)

[letters](#)

[advertise](#)

[subscribe](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[back page](#)

## Schools of thought: the sector's response to Gove 2013

**Michael Gove's much-anticipated announcement about school sport brought out the worst in the sport system. Mick Owen reviewed the responses with a shaking head.**

David Cameron has made many mistakes in his passing occupation of 10 Downing Street but appointing Michael Gove as secretary of state for education will stand as one of his signature errors. Like putting a fox to work guarding a hen house, it juxtaposed a rabid and random killer with the very elements of the farmyard economy most in need of tender and thoughtful nurture. Gove was accordingly vulpine in his attack and, despite a partial U-turn, managed to tear down the school sport structure which had taken Sue Campbell more than a decade to construct.

Political in its ambition and petulant in its delivery, Gove's 2011 attack was frenzied, personal and posited on misunderstanding the very nature of education. His 2013 announcement, dragged from Downing Street by the yowling demand for "legacy", has barely replaced the school sport funding and remains fatally flawed in its promotion of competition and sport rather than physical literacy and healthy activity.

But if Gove's headline announcement reveals a woeful lack of comprehension the response from the sport, leisure and culture sector has betrayed a far more damaging lack of cohesion. National politics have ruined school sport but inter-agency politicking will keep it on its knees.

The first responses to Gove's announcement are a template. With the date for education's Moses to share the content of his slabs of rock set for Saturday 16 March, the newly rebranded UKActive offered us this, on Friday 15 March: pausing only to rubbish the distinction between competitive and non-competitive activity, their chief executive, David Stalker, trumpeted, "Recognising that there are lots of activities outside the traditional spectrum of competitive sports, we hope that schools will be open to wider partnerships with activity providers, including those in UKActive's membership."

Without even seeing the document Stalker sought to make the case for his membership as partners in spending Gove's expected millions and, by doing so the day before the actual release, he sought to position his organisation as a talking head for radio and television coverage with a commensurate enhancement of its public profile. Ahead of the game certainly, but who were they racing and why?

When Gove's trumpeted return of 150 of the 162 millions of pounds he had previously filched became official, the answer to that question became apparent. Sport England, being a government agency where everyone knows which hands to bite (albeit toothlessly) and which to lick, were quickly out of the traps with a predictably obsequious reaction but, less predictably, they also lined up a couple of governing body of sport talking heads to welcome the "excellent news".

With England Hockey's Holly Woodford cheerily suggesting that the planned investment "shows the government is serious about creating a school sport legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games", it [www.theleisurereview.co.uk](http://www.theleisurereview.co.uk)

**"Gove's 2013 announcement, dragged from Downing Street by the yowling demand for "legacy", has barely replaced the school sport funding and remains fatally flawed in its promotion of competition and sport rather than physical literacy and healthy activity."**

The Leisure Review is supported by:



The Leisure Review is written, designed and published by:

became clear to industry observers that she, in common one imagines with much of the NGB sector, had swallowed whole the bit on the Department for Education's website that said that this all meant "a greater role for Britain's best sporting and voluntary organisations, including national governing bodies".

Given that the County Sports Partnership Network were also hugging themselves – possibly because Mike Diaper at Sport England had already told them, "Your CSP has a key role to play in this" – and with their chair Richard Saunders happy being quoted as saying, "We are pleased that the role of CSPs has been recognised in the announcements and we accept the challenge and responsibility contained in the announcements", it soon became clear that someone had failed to read the small print. Who was getting the money: the NGBs or the CSPs?

As it turned out, it was the schools themselves and this explained the feeding frenzy. Someone is going to have to 'help' schools spend what the Department for Education calculations say will be an average £9,250 per year. And if headteachers are not to be trusted with organising sport in their schools (and Sue Campbell has fuelled that fire by claiming that some heads "don't know what high-quality PE looks like... It's as if they look out the window and see kids running around, making lots of noise, and think that's fine because they're burning off energy") then clearly CSPs and NGBs are in the frame. Headteachers will have to get used to the queue of NGB development officers who have spent the last year harassing sports development departments in universities ever since Sport England reframed its funding to target only the 16 to 25 year-olds.

While little has been heard from headteachers, who have many other more important battles to wage with their ministers, the Association for Physical Education (AfPE) did decide to join in, saying they are "delighted with the government's investment in physical education and school sport and the ringfenced allocation will mean that all pupils should directly benefit". You can not fault their optimism, although their collective memory is suspect. If headteachers valued sport or had been persuaded of its benefits by the now-out-of-work Youth Sport Trust partnership development managers Michael Gove could have saved himself the angst of making this latest budget allocation.

True to form in this particular dog fight, AfPE also made its own bid for what we are led to believe some people call 'bunce': "It is important that part of this investment is used to up-skill primary teachers so that they are able to deliver high-quality physical education for all children and young people." Having made the bid for their share of the cash, they then add a little Govean over-egging, saying, "Confident teachers will inspire children and young people to want to take part in school sport and competition and will ensure a sustainable legacy."

So where will each school's £9,250 end up each year? One hopes that very little of it will arrive in the bank account of anyone with 'development manager' in their job title or the name of any one sport; primary schools do not need any more football coaches on their premises than have already found their way past the Alcatraz-style fencing which serves only to keep local kids from playing in the playground out of hours.

With no real investment in primary PE teaching at the training stage and a piecemeal approach to "up-skilling" in the YST era, it seems extremely likely that private coaching companies will be rubbing their hands with glee and emailing head teachers with all manner of promises.

The Twitter feed of COMPASS, the trade body for companies delivering sport in schools, suggests that this is likely. Naturally the first response was "marvellous news", followed immediately by the very welcome, "But

let's look at how that delivery will be undertaken." If we accept that "COMPASS is about quality delivery, fit for purpose quals & staff development", which is averred in the next tweet, then we should be glad that COMPASS "want to work with School Heads". If we think that commercial coaching companies are simply money-making entities for their owners and shareholders we may begin to question whether Gove's announcement is any more than yet another way to put public money into private bank accounts.

There have been many messages of welcome for Gove's latest scheme and doubtless some people believe that good will come of it. At *The Leisure Review* we are less sanguine and, while we acknowledge that there are many excellent coaches delivering spot-on PE lessons in the stead of over-worked, under-trained primary school teachers, we also know that primary school headteachers will reach for the closest and simplest solution when their pupil premium comes in. If that is offered by a CSP which struggles to find their school on the sub-regional, some still say county, map, an NGB which desperately wants ticks in its participation boxes or a bloke with a bag of balls and a winning smile, then we may see a further deterioration in the physical literacy and mental and physical health of the nation's school children.

**Mick Owen is the managing editor of *The Leisure Review*.**

***The Leisure Review*, April 2013**

© Copyright of all material on this site is retained by *The Leisure Review* or the individual contributors where stated. Contact *The Leisure Review* for details.